



Criminal Justice Legislative Oversight Committee

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Whitmire and Madden Optimistic About New Prison Population Projections

AUSTIN, Texas -- State Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston) and State Representative Jerry Madden (R-Plano) announced their optimism over newly released adult incarceration population projections. As required by the General Appropriations Act, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) released updated population projections for fiscal years 2008-2012. According to an LBB update provided earlier this week, projected populations have leveled and will be within prison operating capacity by the end of this fiscal year. The new projection is in contrast with the projection done at the beginning of 2007 showing the prison system to be short more than 17,000 prison beds by 2012 and potentially requiring nearly half a billion dollars for new capacity.

"For years, Texas has been the toughest state in the nation on crime," Senator Whitmire commented. "With the expanded treatment and new diversion beds funded this last session, Texas will continue to be the toughest on crime, but we will now also be the smartest."

The 80th Legislature approved \$218 million for the expansion of treatment and diversion programs within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. In addition to restoring treatment to existing capacity in our prisons, the Legislature also created over 5700 new beds. New initiatives include additional mental health services for offenders, additional residential treatment beds for probationers, increased parole halfway house capacity, and additional substance abuse treatment for inmates and probationers.

The new program expansion is expected to have a positive impact in reducing the demand for prison space, save hundreds of millions of dollars in new prison construction, and improve public safety by reducing the recidivism of substance abuse offenders. The programs will also allow the prison system to operate within manageable population levels which is particularly important given the severe correctional officer shortage.

"Not only are we saving taxpayer money by creating diversion programs, we are also strengthening public safety by increasing our prison capacity," stated Representative Madden. "The additional beds will ensure we have the space to lock up violent and repeat offenders, but the state will also save money in the long run by treating and diverting low level offenders."

"We are committed to having strong oversight of the implementation of the new programs to guarantee their effectiveness while also investigating ways to address the correctional officer shortage and improve the ability of prison officials to maintain a secure, safe prison system," stated Whitmire and Madden.

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